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Statement submitted by La manif pour tous, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

A new form of exploitation of women has been gaining ground in recent years: surrogacy, a practice that must be condemned and fought in order to achieve target 5.2 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Thousands of women are being used for reproductive purposes, considered nothing but a uterus and exploited as incubators while the international community sits idly by.

In fact, this practice is nothing less than exploitation as defined under article 4 of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.

As a form of exploitation it is moreover highly lucrative, being a money-spinner for all stakeholders in this new industry: laboratories, biologists, doctors, lawyers, salespersons, financiers and insurance companies. The surrogate mother, meanwhile, earns a paltry sum, if she is not doubly victimized because she is but a volunteer while all other parties in so-called "altruistic" agreements make huge profits.

The global surrogacy market is currently estimated to be worth at least $4 billion.

Surrogate motherhood is a new form of violence against women, constituting a major invasion of both their being and their intimate life during what is an intensely physical and psychological experience.

This sexual and reproductive exploitation represents a clear form of slavery, which article 1 of the 1926 Slavery Convention defines as "the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised".

Any individual or organization exploiting a woman in this manner is exercising ownership by usurping her reproductive capacity. They intentionally deprive her of the full exercise of her reproductive rights so that others can profit.

All surrogate mothers are victims, regardless of the context. No little girl grows up with dreams of allowing her body to be used by others or of giving away or selling her children.

Furthermore, it is clear that the vast majority of surrogate mothers are poor, educationally deprived and often mentally vulnerable; it is precisely that vulnerability that opens them up to exploitation.

Poverty can never justify the exploitation of women.

To meet target 1 of the 2030 Agenda, it is essential to combat violence against women. As concluded at the sixty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the empowerment of women and their full access to the workforce are critical factors in the eradication of poverty; controlling their reproductive freedom is not.

Surrogacy is either tolerated or legalized in many countries. The international community must assume its responsibilities and capitalize on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda to combat this form of violence against women.

Should we legalize the exploitation of women? Should we provide a legal framework for slavery? No; we must be resolute in our opposition and we count on all Member States to continue the fight to protect women from every single form of exploitation.